

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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O R 271356Z MAR 75
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACI IMMEDIATE 2047
INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 5138

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, MARR, TH, CB
SUBJECT: DISCUSSIONS WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ON CAMBODIA AND U.S.
FORCE LEVELS

DEPARTMENT PASS SECDEF, CINCPAC, DIRNSA

1. I WAS CALLED TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TO SEE
FOREIGN MINISTER CHATICHAI CHOONHAVAN, TODAY, MARCH 27. THIS
TELEGRAM BRIEFLY SUMMARIZES DISCUSSION. MORE DETAILED
ACCOUNTS WILL FOLLOW. DISCUSSIONS CENTERED AROUND U.S. AIR-
LIFT OPERATIONS FROM THAILAND IN SUPPORT OF CAMBODIA, PROS-
PECTS FOR CAMBODIA, AND U.S. FORCE LEVELS IN THAILAND.

2. CONVERSATION OPENED WITH GENERAL DISCUSSION OF SECURITY
SITUATION IN CAMBODIA. I GAVE CHATICHAI STANDARD BRIEFING
WE HAVE BEEN USING HERE, NOT CONCEALING DIFFICULT MILITARY
SITUATION BUT STATING VIEW THAT GKR HAD CHANCE OF SURVIVING
THROUGH DRY SEASON IF U.S. SUPPORT CONTINUED, AND STRESSING
THAT THIS WAS ESSENTIAL IF SITUATION IN CAMBODIA WAS NOT
TO CALLPASE TO GREAT DISADVANTAGE OF THAILAND.

3. CHATICHAI MADE A FEW GENERAL REMARKS ABOUT THE RTG'S
CURRENT VIEW OF CAMBODIA. THAI POLICY WAS TO LET THE KHMER
WORK OUT THEIR OWN ARRANGEMENTS. THAILAND DID NOT WISH
TO INTERFERE OR INTERVENE IN THIS PROCESS. THE THAI HAD
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TO LOOK AHEAD TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A KHMER ROUGE VICTORY,

AND WISHED TO AVOID PUTTING THEMSELVES IN A POSITION COM-PARABLE TO THAT WHICH THEY OCCUPIED VIS-A-VIS HANOI AS RESULT OF THAI INVOLVEMENT IN THE WAR IN VIETNAM.

4. CHATICHAI THEN BROUGHT UP THE QUESTION OF U.S. AIRLIFT OPERATONS. SPEAKING, HE SAID, FOR THE PRIME MINISTER, CHATICHAI SAID THAT THE FLIGHTS COULD CONTINUE FOR HUMANITARIAN PURPOSES. ALTHOUGH IT COULD NOT BE SAID IN PUBLIC, THE PRIME MINISTER FELT THAT IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS, AMMUNITION COULD BE CARRIED. THE IMPORTANT THING WAS TO AVOID PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF THIS FACT.

5. I EMPHASIZED THAT THE FULL-RANGE OF AIRLIFT SUPPORT, ONLY PART OF WHICH WAS AMMO, WAS ESSENTIAL TO SUSTAIN THE GKR AND SAID THAT MY GOVERNMENT WOULD TAKE A MOST SERIOUS VIEW OF ANY EFFORTS TO INTERRUPT IT.

6. CHATICHAI RETREATED TO REASSURANCE THAT RTG HAD NOT CHANGED ITS POLICY TOWARD GKR BUT ONLY WANTED TO TAKE CERTAIN SAFEGUARDS TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION. HE CAREFULLY AVOIDED ORDING A HALT TO THE AMMO LIFT BUT REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF DESCRIBING THE AIRLIFT IN PUBLIC AS HUMANITARIAN IN NATURE AND AVOIDING STEPS THAT WOULD BLOD THIS COVER. HE AND MFA DIRECTOR GENRAL OF INFORMATION PRACHA, WHO WAS ALSO PRESENT, COMPLAINED ABOUT THE ALMOST DAILY PUBLICITY COMING OUT OF PHNOM PENH ON THE ARRIVAL OF AMMUNITION FROM THAILAND AND ASKED THAT ALL POSSIBLE MEASURES BE TAKEN TO ELIMINATE THIS.

7. I SAID THAT WHILE IT WAS POSSIBLE TO EXERCISE SOME CONTROL OVER OFFICIAL STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS, IT WAS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO PREVEN THE PRESS FROM REPORTING WHAT IT COULD ACTUALLY SEE. I AGREED THAT WE WOULD DO WHAT WE COULD TO AVOID PUBLIC DIFFICULTIES FOR THE RTG, ALTHOUGH WE COULD NOT GUARANTEE 100 PERCENT SUCCESS. AND I STRESSED THAT BOTH SIDES, THAI AS WELL AS UMS., SHOULD FOLLOW THE SAME POLICY OF SAYING AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE ON THE AIRLIFT TO THE PRESS.

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8. CHATICHAI PROBED REPEATEDLY ON THE SUBJECT OF LON NOL. HE SOUGHT TO ELICIT AN INDICATION THAT THE U.S. COULD AND WOULD DUMP LON NOL, AND EXPRESSED A CLEAR PREFERENCE FOR A SOLUTION THAT WOULD INCLUDE SIHANOUK AS HEAD OF GOVERNMENT IN CAMBODIA. I CONFINED MYSELF TO REPLYING THAT WE SUPPORTED THE GKR AND THAT LON NOL WAS HEAD OF THAT GOVERNMENT. IF THE GKR REPLACED LON

NOL WITH ANOTHER HEAD, WE WOULD DEAL WITH HIM. BUT I STRESSED THAT WE WOULD NOT BE A PARTY TO REMOVING LON NOL. ANY SUCH ACTION, IF IT OCCURRED, WAS ENTIRELY UP TO THE KHMER.

9. PICKING UP CHATICHAIS COMMENT THAT THE KHMER SHOULD SOLVE THEIR OWN PROBLEMS, I SAID WE FULLY SHARED THIS VIEW. HOWEVER, BOTH SIDES HAD TO PLAY BY THESE RULES. AS LONG AS HANOI CONTINUED ITS MASSIVE MATERIAL SUPPORT FOR THE KHMER COMMUNISTS, IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT THE U.S. AND ITS FRIENDS AND ALLIES SUPPORT THE NON-COMMUNIST FORCES TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITY. ONLY IN THIS WAY COULD WE ENHANCE THE PROSPECTS FOR A GOVERNMENT INCLUDING THE MORE MODERATE ELEMENTS. A KHMER ROUGE VICTORY WOULD USHER IN A MILITANT, INTRACTABLE COMMHIST REGIME AND PROBABLY PRECIPITATE A BLOOD BATH. IF WE ALL HUNG IN THERE, WE WOULD HAVE CHANCE OF ACHIEVING A BETTER OUTCOME. CHATICHAI GAVE GRUDGING ASSENT.

10. ON U.S. FORCE LEVELS, CHATICHAI BEGAN BY READING THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S POLICY STATEMENT ON THE SUBJECT, WHICH CALLED FOR A TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN TROOPS WITHIN ONE YEAR SUBJECT TO THE SECURITY SITUATION PRE-VAILING IN THE AREA. CHATICHAI MADE REPEATED MENTION OF THEYA THAT THIS POLICY MADE WITHDRAWAL CONDITIONAL UPON THE SECURITY SITUATION, AND STRONGLY IMPLIED THAT THE GOVERNMENT INTENDED TO FALL BACK ON THIS AS AN ESCAPE CLAUSE IF NECESSARY. HE SAID THAT WHEN THE THAI PEOLE TOOK IN THE FULL CONSEQUENCES OF EVENTS IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES, AND PARTICULARLY SOUTH VIETNAM, THIS WOULD PREPARE THE WAY FOR A SHIFT OF THE POLICY AWAY FROM THE ONE YEAR DEADLINE. IN ORDER TO ALLOW THIS PROCESS TO WORK,

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HOWEVER, IT WOULD BE NECESSARY FOR THE THAI AND U.S. SIDES AT LEAST TO HOLD MEETINGS ON THE SUBJECT OF TROOP CUTS. CHATICHAI TRIED TO PIN ME DOWN TO A FIRM COMMITMENT THAT SUCH A MEETING WOULD BE HELD VERY SHORTLY.

1. I TOLD CHATICHAI THAT GIVEN EVENTS IN CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM, OUR PREFERNCE WOULD BE TO HAVE NO DISCUSSION OF TROOP CUTS AT THIS POINT, SINCE THIS WOULD PROVIDE THE WRONG SIGNALS. ONCE THROUGH THE DRY SEASON, WE WOULD BE READY NOT ONLY TO DISCUSS TROOP CUTS BUT TO MAKE SOME WITHDRAWALS AS WELL, BUT THE TIMING WAS VERY IMPORTANT. CHATICHAI CONTINUED TO PRESS NOT ONLY FOR A MEETING TO DISCUSS WITHDRAWAL BUT FOR EARLY WITHDRAWALS THEMSELVES, ALTHOUGH HE IMPLIED THAT INITIALLY VERY MODEST CUTS MIGHT SUFFICE. HE SAID THAT THIS WAS NECESSARY IN

ORDER FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO RESPOND TO PRESSURES FROM
WITHIN AND WITHOUT PARLIAMENT.

NOTE BY OC/T; NOT PASSED SECDEF, CINCPAC, DIRNSA.

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EXDIS

12. IN ORDER NOT TO DISRUPT OUR AGREEMENT ON THE AIRLIFT,
I TOLD CHATICHAI THAT I THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE NO OBJECTION
ON OUR SIDE TO A MEETING TO DISCUSS OUR MILITARY PRESENCE,
PROVIDED IT DID NOT FOCUS ON TROOP CUTS. I SUGGESTED THE
MEETING COULD BE DESCRIBED AS HAVING IAS ITS OBJECTIVE
A REVIEW OF THE U.S. FORCE PRESENCE IN THAILAND. CHATICHAI
AND HIS ASSOCIATES SEEMED TO ASSENT TO THIS.

13. IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT BETWEEN THE DISCUSSION OF
CAMBODIA AND OF U.S. FORCE LEVELS, CHATICHAI DEFTELY
INSERTED A DISCUSSION OF INADEQUACIES IN THE EQUIPMENT OF
THE THAI ARMED FORCES IN COMPARISON WITH THE MODERN WEAPONRY
OF POTENTIALLY HOSTILE NEIGHBORS. (HE ALSO EXPLICITLY
REFERRED TO HIS CONVERSATION ON THE SUBJECT LAST FALL
WITH DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE CLEMENTS, TO WHICH HE NOTED THEE
HAD BEEN NO RESPONSE.) ALTHOUGH HE HIMSELF MADE NO DIRECT
CONNECTION, THAT IMPLICATION WAS THAT IF THE U.S. COULD DO
SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT FOR THAILAND IN SECURITY ASSISTANCE,
THIS COULD HAVE A BEARING ON THAILAND'S ATTITUDE TOWARD
BOTH U.S.-CAMBODIAN SUPPORT ACTIVITIES AND U.S. FORCE
LEVELS IN THAILAND.

14. COMMENT: ON THE CAMBODIAN PROBLEM, THE RTG IS CLEARLY
VERY NERVOUS ABOUT WHAT LIES AHEAD. IT IS NOT PREPARED
TO MAKE AN OVERT AND ABRUPT CHANGE IN ITS CURRENT POLICY,
INCLUDING RECOGNITION OF THE LON NOL GOVERNMENT, BUT IT

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WISHES TO LOWER ITS PROFILE TO THE VANISHING POPOINT IN
TERMS OF MILITARY SUPPORT FOR THAT GOVERNMENT. I BELIEVE
IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE THAI WILL PERMIT THE FULL RANGE OF
OUR ACTIVITIES TO CONTINUE PROVIDED THE MILITARY SUPPLY
COMPONENT (AMMO, ETC.) CAN BE KEPT FROM PUBLIC VIEW TO
MAXIMUM EXTENT, AND THUS NOT BECOME AN ISSUE OF RTG
CREDITIBILITY. THIS WILL NOT BE EASY BUT WILL REQUIRE
THE BEST EFFORTS OF ALL OF US.

15. AS TO U.S. FORCE LEVELS, IN THE SHORT RUN, AT LEAST,
WE MAY BE ABLE TO NEGOTIATE A SATISFACTORY OUTCOME FROM
OUR POINT OF VIEW, BUT WE MUST EXPECT THAT THE THAI WILL
CONTINUE IN PUBLIC TO EMPHASIZE THE 12-MONTH DEADLINE
ASPECT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY. AS EVERYONE KNOWS,
CHATICHAI IS AN OPPORTUNISTIC POLITICAN AND A BLABBER-
MOUTH. I FULLY EXPECT THAT IN TOMORROW MORNING'S NEWSPAPERS,
I WILL READ HEADLINES SAYING SOMETHING LIKE "CHATICHAI
TELLS U.S. FORCES MUST GO'." OUR RECOMMENDATIONS
ON HOW TO HANDLE THIS WILL FOLLOW.

MASTERS

NOTE BY OCT: NOT PASSED SECDEF, CINCPAC, AND DIRNSA.

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